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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001211

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH LEADERS CRITICIZE IRAQI TURKMEN FRONT;
LOCAL ITF REP SAYS "WE ARE AN UNLUCKY NATION"

REF: A. BAGHDAD 824

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 645

[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 595

[1](#)D. BAGHDAD 568

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: GOT leaders have criticized the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) for its poor showing in the Iraqi elections. ITF's Ankara representative told us that his party favors Ja'afari for Prime Minister and will continue to fight for Turkmen rights in Kirkuk. He accused the U.S. of treating Iraq's Turkmen unfairly as payback for the 2003 Turkish decision not to allow U.S. forces to enter Iraq from Turkey, and of manipulating election results in Kirkuk. Ankara may be displeased with the ITF, but the ITF's views appear to be unchanged and we doubt Ankara will cease its patronage for the party. If Turkey is eventually permitted to open consulates in Iraq, however, ITF will cease to be one of Ankara's only sources of information. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Following the poor results for the Ankara-supported Iraqi Turkmen Front in Jan. 30 elections, both PM Erdogan and FonMin Gul (while still voicing Turkish concerns about alleged election fraud) harshly criticized the ITF's performance. Nationwide, the ITF received 93,000 votes and only three seats in the TNA. In Kirkuk governorate, ITF polled 73,000 votes (compared to 237,000 for the Kurdish coalition); ITF and its allies control only eight of 41 seats on the governorate council (GC).

[1](#)3. (C) Erdogan fired the first shot, telling an AKP Executive Board meeting on Feb. 15 that "ITF could not carry out its task. Their leaders were in Ankara during the election...They did not devote the necessary attention to the elections." Gul followed up on March 2, telling the Turkish daily Hurriyet "I cannot deny we are disappointed about the Turkmen." He criticized ITF for displaying the "gray wolf" (Turkish arch-nationalist symbol), and noted that apparently more Iraqi Turkmen voted for Shia and Kurdish parties in Iraq than the ITF. MFA Under Secretary Ali Tuygan told the Ambassador March 4 that the results the Turkmen achieved were disappointing and that the MFA recognized errors in the way ITF had been advised. The approach had left the Turkmen vote split between Shia and Sunni and various party lists. He added that he looked forward to a census, so that the size of the Turkmen population could actually be clearer.

[1](#)4. (C) In the midst of this criticism, PolMilOff called on the ITF's Ankara representative, Ahmet Muratli, on March 3 to get a readout on the ITF's view of the election and their way ahead. Muratli admitted that he was tired and a bit dispirited from both the election results and the GOT's criticism. Nonetheless, he insisted the ITF made the right decision to participate in the election, that the party is "not affected psychologically" by the loss, and that "we will continue our struggle."

[1](#)5. (C) Muratli bemoaned the Turkish parliament's March 1, 2003 decision not to allow coalition forces (CF) to enter Iraq from Turkey. He believes that the U.S. was angry at Turkey and took out this anger on the Iraqi Turkmen. Thus, Muratli said, "we are an unlucky nation." (PolMilOff disputed that CF have treated Iraqi Turkmen unfairly. COMMENT: We recall that the ITF itself opposed the war and resisted being fully associated with the Iraqi opposition of the time, so Muratli's criticism of the March 1 vote is disingenuous at best. END COMMENT.)

[1](#)6. (C) Muratli reported that the ITF has thrown its support to List 169's choice for Prime Minister, Ibrahim Ja'afari. ITF believes that it is more democratic that the coalition with the most votes gets to choose the PM. Furthermore, List 169 includes five Turkmen, and ITF wants to work together with other Turkmen in the TNA (it estimates there are 15 total) on areas of common interest, particularly the constitution and the future of Kirkuk. He hopes the Iraqi Turkmen can serve as a bridge to solve differences between Shias and Kurds.

[1](#)7. (C) For the ITF, Muratli said, Kirkuk is still the key issue, "the one not to be given up." He accused U.S. forces

of manipulating the Kirkuk GC election results both in favor of and to the detriment of the Kurds. In Muratli's formulation, the U.S. allowed mass movements of Kurds to Kirkuk to change the demographics on the ground and also permitted Kurds to be trucked in from Suleimaniyah on election day to vote again in Kirkuk, but then stepped in to prevent the Kurds from controlling 28 of the GC's 41 seats. Why, PolMilOff asked, would we permit the Kurds to control 26 GC seats but not 28? Muratli responded that 28 seats would mean two-thirds control of the council, and would thus be excessive.

18. (C) Muratli complained about developments in Kirkuk since the election, such as the governor allegedly freezing the assignment of teachers (presumably to ensure Kurds get the jobs) and making Kurdish the "official" language of the province. PolMilOff pointed out that the governor had actually issued a directive reminding Kirkukis that both Arabic and Kurdish were the official languages of Iraq under the TAL, not mandating Kurdish as the only official language.

Muratli seemed surprised to hear this. Muratli added that Kurdish peshmerga are taking over control of the security apparatus for the city. "Are you going to stop them (the Kurds) if they go too far?" PolMilOff responded that security in the province was the responsibility of the Iraqi Security Forces, and that REO Kirkuk and Task Force Warrior were also monitoring developments there. He repeated that the U.S. supports an orderly and national solution for Kirkuk as laid out in the TAL; Muratli affirmed ITF support for the TAL as well.

19. (C) Comment: We should not interpret Erdogan and Gul's criticism as a signal they are cutting the ITF loose, at least not yet. ITF was primarily the creation of the military and the bureaucracy, not the ruling AK Party. Whatever their political failings, the ITF continues to be an important, albeit flawed, source of information on developments on the ground for the GOT and the Turkish press. This is likely to remain the situation until the Iraqi authorities agree to allow Turkey to open consulates in Iraq. As for the ITF itself, Muratli's comments indicate that the party is not planning to change its course soon. End comment.

10. (U) Iraq posts minimize considered.
EDELMAN